



Update on the Common Core State Standards Initiative

Testimony of
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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Kline, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the Common Core State Standards Initiative. On behalf of the National Governors Association and as Chair of the Education, Early Childhood and Workforce Committee, I am honored to be with you today.

Our economy is now truly global, and the competitiveness of our education system must reflect this. To maintain America's competitive edge, all of our students need to be well-prepared and ready to compete not only with their American peers, but also with students from around the world. The state-led development of common core state standards is a critical first step to bring about real and meaningful transformation of state education systems to benefit all students.

I know through my experience upgrading Colorado's state standards how important these decisions are to setting the path for our state education's progress.

Update on Common Core State Standards Initiative

Since my colleague Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue submitted written testimony to this committee in April 2009, states have made marked progress in improving our education systems compared to international benchmarks. Forty-eight states, two territories and the District of Columbia have joined the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which charges the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to jointly develop common core standards in English language arts and mathematics by February 2010.

I believe that this initiative has a high probability for success. Several major national organizations, including the Alliance for Excellent Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the American Federation of Teachers, the Business Roundtable, the Council of Great City Schools, the Hunt Institute, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the National Education Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers are supporting the initiative. Endorsing partners also include businesses such as GlaxoSmithKline and the Intel Corporation.

The state-led common core process is intended to produce "fewer, clearer, and higher" standards that are research- and evidence-based as well as internationally benchmarked. In preparing these standards, we drew examples from the most competitive states in the nation. The goal is to ensure that all students who meet these new standards will have the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college and a career, thereby improving the nation's competitiveness in today's global economy.

On behalf of participating states, NGA and CCSSO are taking responsibility for the production of the standards. These organizations have solicited the input of a number of leading experts and practitioners to assist in the development of college- and career-readiness and K-12 standards for English language arts and mathematics. In addition, the organizations have sought input from states, content groups, educators' associations, and the general public. This feedback will be used to refine drafts and ensure that the

standards are informed by the best research and practice. Finally, a validation committee of independent national experts—all of whom were nominated by state and national organizations' leaders and confirmed by governors—will conduct a final review of the standards process and products.

The final draft of the standards will be released in February 2010. A public draft of the college and career readiness standards was released in September 2009; NGA and CCSSO received nearly 1,000 survey responses to these standards. All the public comments are being reviewed, and work groups will determine the revisions necessary to respond to the comments received. The first public draft of the K-12 standards will be available in January 2010. A detailed description of the development process as well as information about individuals and organizations involved in the process is available on www.corestandards.org. A summary chart explaining the process is also enclosed with this testimony.

State Adoption of Standards

Once the standards have been finalized, states will decide whether to adopt the English language arts and mathematics standards for the students in their states. Let me stress this important point: The adoption of the state-led and developed common core state standards is voluntary and allows for public input. States that choose to adopt the standards will be responsible for demonstrating that they have adhered to the terms of adoption. This is and must remain a state-led effort.

The appropriate authority in each state, working with state and local leaders, teachers, and parents, will make the decision whether to adopt the standards. For many states, a state board of education will make this decision; in other instances, the chief state school officer, governor and/or legislature may play a role in the decision. The state-led process of adoption will take time and will vary from state to state. The NGA/CCSSO process gives states up to three years to adopt.

State Leadership for Education Improvement

Governors recognize that the adoption of a strong set of academic standards is just an initial step toward upgrading state education systems. States have both the authority and the responsibility to provide students with a high-quality education, and many states are *already* deeply engaged in efforts to raise standards, advance teaching quality, and improve low-performing schools. International benchmarking provides an additional tool for making that process more effective, offering insights and ideas that cannot be garnered solely from looking within and across state lines.

Governors are encouraged that many states have begun to move forward on the first of five bold recommendations included in the [*Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*](#) report issued by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, Inc. The high-level advisory group that participated in the development of this report, including Colorado's chief, Commissioner Dwight Jones, unanimously agreed to five state-level action steps:

- Upgrading state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts for grades K-12 to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive;
- Leveraging states' collective influence to ensure that textbooks, digital media, curricula, and assessments are aligned to internationally benchmarked standards and draw on lessons from high-performing nations and states;
- Revising state policies for recruiting, preparing, developing, and supporting teachers and school leaders to reflect the human capital practices of top-performing nations and states around the world;
- Holding schools and systems accountable through monitoring, interventions, and support to ensure consistently high performance, drawing upon international best practices; and
- Measuring state-level education performance against global benchmarks by examining student achievement and attainment in an international context to ensure that, over time, students receive the education they need to compete in the 21st century economy.

With a set of common standards in place, states may be in a position to move forward with several of these important recommendations.

NGA will soon release a publication proposing an approach to a common and comprehensive state assessment system that would maximize alignment with the common core standards; allow for comparisons across students, schools, districts, and states; and form the foundation for a new accountability system, while ultimately providing information that supports effective teaching and learning and prepares students for college and postsecondary careers.

Federal Government Support

While governors believe states must lead the international benchmarking and common state standards development effort, the federal government can play a critical role to support state-level reform efforts—specifically, one that is less restrictive and mandate-driven and more encouraging of innovation.

Through the creation of the Race to the Top Fund, Congress and the Administration took the first step in shifting the focus of federal policy from a punitive, mandate-driven compliance system toward a federal-state partnership that supports state-led innovation. For example, the Race to the Top Fund competition provides carrots—not sticks—to voluntary state adoption of common standards. Moreover, the federal government also wisely recognized that standards must be led and developed by states, for states. For this reason, I would like to thank this committee, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Administration for recognizing governors' requests to extend the timeline for adoption of state standards as part of the Race to the Top application. Governors appreciate the acknowledgement of states' individual contextual adoption requirements.

Moving forward, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will be a critical opportunity to rethink and evolve the new federal-state partnership and capitalize on the power of state-led innovations to improve education. Much work remains, and governors stand ready to work with the committee on this important reauthorization.

Conclusion

In this time of economic difficulty, we recognize more than ever the importance of educational preparation to the well-being of our citizens, our states, and this nation. Thank you for your ongoing interest and support for a state-led process to develop a common core of state standards.

CCSSO/NGA Common Core State Standards Process

